2:Ling & Ruey--128 E-5 (1933) 1947 AE5 Miao AE5

CHAPTER FIVE

THE FAMILY AND MARRIAGE AND FUNERAL CUSTOMS

(1) The Family

594 The basic social organization /sic/ of the Miao is the family, and moreover their family structure is the small family system, which consists of husband, wife, and children under age. This kind of small family system is the original system of the Miao. The Miao Fang Pei Lan, in the chapter on [591] villages, says: "Among the Miao people father and sons and brothers do not live together in one house. When a son grows up he lives apart, erecting a new house and then there is another household." Because of the small family system their [573] living quarters as a rule consist of two or three rooms. In the house there is only one bed, and the husband, wife, and children all sleep on it together. When a girl grows up, a separate bed may be set up for her. As a rule the Miao practice [595] monogamy. Sometimes they take a concubine, to live together with the wife, or to live separately. In the family [462] economy, men and women share agricultural work, but household [423] chores are mainly the women's responsibility. Family [422] property consists of fields, houses, animals, and furniture, tools, and utensils. When the children grow up, a boy gets [582] married at 17 or 18, and is given a certain amount of property in order to build a separate house and establish a family. A girl marries at fifteen or sixteen. So, the small family system among the Miao can always be maintained, and is not likely to be expanded.

614 Because of strict adherence to the small family system, clan organization cannot develop. Among the pure Miao there 551 are the following five surnames: Wu, Lung, Liao, Shih, and Ma. Such surnames as Yang, Shih, P'eng, Chang, and Hung were those of outsiders who married into Miao families and

/240/

241 423 596 Through the labor performed on the land, it thereby passes into the possession of the head of the large /extended/ family. Every large family cultivates its land collectively; there is no distribution of the land among the individual small families of the family union. Just as a large family often cultivates several fields at the same time, it also frequently happens that several large families jointly cultivate only one large field. It depends on the number of individuals in a large family. If several large families, each with few members, jointly cultivate the soil, the land is divided into corresponding sections, each of which is tilled by one large family. Since the fields remain productive for only a short time, a later redistribution is unnecessary.

423 Wild fruits, plants, or trees belong to the person who collects or uses them.

422 [423] [596] Among the Meau only the house itself belongs to the head of the large family, whereas the furnishings are the joint property of all the occupants. This is true of the kitchen equipment, the domestic animals, saddles, bridles, and the like. On the other hand, clothing, weapons, and personal ornaments are the property of the individuals, who usually obtained these objects as gifts, [431] for example, from the head of the large family or the partner of a love affair, and, in the case of children, from their parents, or they made them themselves, such as weapons, traps, and so forth. Similarly, the equipment that the wife has brought into the marriage, such as clothing and the dowry in general, remains her personal property.

The Meau have no special marks of ownership; hence such distinguishing marks are used neither on personal property nor on the domestic animals of the large family.

426 The legal conditions are definite for every form of loan, whether it is money, that is, silver, or field produce, animals, etc. that is involved. Loans are granted and handed over in the presence of three witnesses. No interest has to be paid for a loan up to one year; for a longer period, regardless of whether it is paid back in two years or in ten, interest has to be paid once, amounting to one-third of the value received. For example, if a person has borrowed 21 baskets of rice, 28 baskets are

/245 cont./

428 596 head who succeeds the deceased takes them into his house upon the now ensuing dismemberment of the large family. Moreover, all the possessions of the large family are now distributed among the occupants of the house up to now; therefore the sons who are already independent and own their own houses receive nothing. Blood brothers of the deceased likewise cannot [608] inherit anything.

428 803 The distribution begins with the cash or silver. For calculating the distribution, a grain of rice is first taken for each piece of silver. Then all the sons who lived with the deceased under one roof, from the oldest to the youngest, receive in turn two grains of rice. Then all the male grandchildren of the former head, again beginning with the oldest, receive one grain of rice apiece. After the youngest of them has received his grain of rice, /246/ the sequence begins all over again with each son getting two grains of rice and so forth, until all has been distributed. Only then are the pieces of silver substituted for the grains of rice (see also the chapter, "Counting and Reckoning").

Then the ornaments are taken up. Only the sons, however, and not the grandsons, share in them, as in the other possessions. Each of the sons, in the order of their ages, selects an ornament; if any remain, the sequence begins anew. The procedure is the same with the other possessions, the animals, the house and the kitchen utensils, and the like. The produce on hand is distributed in equal shares among the sons. Cultivated fields which have not yet been harvested are tilled jointly by the heirs until the harvest, and then the produce is distributed in accordance with the system just described. The same procedure is followed with the property of the widows of the deceased as soon as they die.

428 [562] [422] The female members of the family are excluded from any inheritance, although they retain what was already their personal property, such as the dowry made by them, the ornaments that they received from their lovers or from their father during his lifetime, and the like. Besides the sons of the deceased who are already independent and therefore no [597] longer qualified to inherit, also his brothers, cousins, and other

/369 cont./

231 [432] "On the other hand, they do sell pigs. Few peoples raise as many pigs as the Meau. They are seen everywhere. In every family there is a pig that is petted and favored by everyone."

[422] I could learn no more about property marks on animals than other authors mention them. Informants whom I questioned explained to me that every owner knows his animals without this.

[171] Whereas most of the other peoples of Farther India practice bee-keeping, I could not find it among the Meau. Other authors, too -- with the exception of Lajonquière (1), who

1. II, p. 310.

mentions them in his enumeration of the domestic animals -- report nothing about this, and the raising of silkworms seems to be just as little known among the Meau of all the regions mentioned. I, too, was unable to find it anywhere.

Among the Meau in Thailand, one sporadically comes across so-called "mandarin blackbirds" /Mandarinenamseln/, which are said to be kept as ornamental birds and traded for high prices.

232 Among the Meau whom I visited, the castration of domestic animals is widespread. This is not limited to pigs, cattle, and horses, but includes even dogs and chickens. The animals are castrated by cutting open the scrotum, tying up the reproductive gland, and sewing up the scrotum again. An exception is made in the case of cattle, whose scrotum is clamped between sticks and smashed with a cudgel. In answer to my question as to why so cruel a procedure is used for them, the Meau were of the opinion that it was nothing for the cattle, that they are much less sensitive to pain than horses.